

## STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI

Re: *Text-Enabled Toll Free Numbers*, WC Docket. No. 18-28.

In a classic 2001 Thanksgiving episode of *The West Wing*, President Bartlett complains to Charlie about the absence of a “hotline you can call with questions about cooking turkey. A special toll free number where the phones are staffed by experts.” When Charlie informs the President that such a service already exists in the form of the Butterball Hotline, Bartlett rejoices.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen years after that episode, the Butterball Hotline still answers over 100,000 turkey-related questions each holiday season. And life has gotten even better, at least from the fictitious President’s perspective: Butterball has also enabled a toll free phone number to receive and respond to texts.<sup>2</sup> President Bartlett would be very proud indeed.

The innovation of text-based turkey advice seems to suggest a growing trend toward toll free text messaging. This trend can be consumer-friendly. For instance, the retailer Land’s End already allows customers to text its toll free number, which many may prefer to the hold music you typically get on a phone call. And toll free texting can also help businesses become more efficient. For example, the company Call-Em-All allows employers to text its workforce using toll free numbers to manage schedules or broadcast last-minute shift needs. With rapid developments in artificial intelligence, these text interactions will likely lead to better service for consumers and productivity gains for businesses.

But there’s a fly in the ointment: One person’s number can become another person’s platform. If a scofflaw can text-enable a phone number without the knowledge or permission of the person who holds that number, the scofflaw could use that texting capability to perpetrate fraud, undermining public confidence in toll free texting.

How do we solve that problem? It’s a simple, free-market solution: more secure and better-defined property rights. We need to make clear who can—and by implication, who cannot—text-enable a toll free number. That’s what this declaratory ruling does. We make absolutely clear that a toll free subscriber—and nobody else—must authorize text-enabling of a number. (This is particularly important for toll free subscribers using that number for voice calls.) With that clear, the *Notice* then seeks public input on what else, if anything, the FCC should do to promote a competitive and innovative marketplace in text messaging services.

Thank you to the staff who have worked on this item: Bill Andrie, Alex Espinoza, Heather Hendrickson, Dan Kahn, Kris Monteith, Eric Ralph, and Michelle Selater in the Wireline Competition Bureau; Terry Cavanaugh, Richard Mallen, and Linda Oliver in the Office of General Counsel; Garnet Hanly, Michael Janson, Elizabeth McIntyre, and Jennifer Salhus in the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; and Kenneth Carlberg, Debra Jordan, Jane Kelly, Lauren Kravetz, and Anita Patankar-Stoll in the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The West Wing: The Indians in the Lobby* (Nov. 21, 2001), available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQsvcs9IB8A>.

<sup>2</sup> See Kate Taylor, For the first time ever, you’ll be able to text Butterball’s turkey help line, *Business Insider* (Oct. 31, 2016), available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/butterball-help-line-adds-texting-2016-10>.